



News Release

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UPPER SNAKE RESERVOIR SYSTEM
HITS RECORD LOW STORAGE TOTAL

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With southern Idaho facing its fourth year of drought, the 2004 water supply outlook grew even more dismal as the Upper Snake River reservoir system hit in mid-October the lowest amount of reservoir storage water ever recorded, the Idaho Department of Water Resources said today.

On October 11 the eight-reservoir system hit 385,000 acre-feet of storage water, only 9 percent of its total capacity. The previous record was in 1977 when only 386,000 acre feet remained. The overall 1977 water supply year was also the lowest ever recorded in Idaho.

Nearly half of the total 2003 carryover is being held in Idaho's Henrys Lake and in Wyoming's Jackson Lake. The remainder of the storage is spread out throughout the rest of the reservoir system.

Carryover water is used like money in a savings account to reduce the amount of new water that has to be captured before the next irrigation season starts, making up the difference in poor precipitation years. That is critical on the Snake River system where irrigators are totally dependent on the annual snow received during winter for their irrigation water supplies. Long-range weather projections for the coming winter are not optimistic for any type of above average snowfall totals, IDWR officials said.

Water managers say the storage shortages have forced them to now focus almost exclusively on capturing and saving every drop of water in system reservoirs except when to do so would jeopardize fish populations on the Snake River. As of October 31, end of the irrigation season, there was 512,000 acre feet of storage water in the system.

Outflows from Island Park, Grassy Lake, Ririe and Henrys Lake reservoirs have been shut off. Water releases from American Falls have been drastically reduced to 350 Cubic Feet Per Second (about 226 million gallons per day). Outflows from Palisades Reservoir are at 1,050 CFS.

The move means total storage water levels in the system are increasing about 8,500 acre feet per day. At that rate, the storage system will have about 1.5 million-acre feet of water by April 1, which is about 36 percent of the system's capacity. That figure virtually guarantees severe irrigation water shortages during the 2004 irrigation season.